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### The power of the gift

**Citation for published version:**

Sinclair, F 2004, 'The power of the gift: Desire and substitution in *Daurel et Beton*', *Modern Language Review*, vol. 99, pp. 902–914.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Modern Language Review

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### The Power of the Gift: Desire and Substitution in *Daurel et Beton*\*

The mid-twelfth-century *Daurel et Beton* is one of the very few surviving examples of the Occitan *chanson de geste*, and even this is incomplete, with perhaps as much as half the narrative missing.<sup>1</sup> The possible reasons for the dearth of medieval Occitan narrative texts and the dominance of the lyric have provoked considerable debate over the years, one too great to enter into here.<sup>2</sup> Yet *Daurel* is without doubt an epic generated in a southern context, adopting northern epic elements, but distinctive in terms of its narrative content and its lack of genealogical link to any Old French epic cycle.<sup>3</sup> Despite this individuality, the *chanson* does fully represent its genre: its preoccupations are those of the majority of *chansons de geste*, which circle around the problematic nature of *compagnonnage*, lineage, feudal loyalty, and the disruption and disintegration of these structures.

In *Daurel et Beton*, as in so many other epics, God, monarch and feudal barons are initially linked in an idealised continuum – a vision of monologic masculinity which is soon fractured and revealed as an ideological dream.<sup>4</sup> But to read this *chanson* purely in terms of a polarised opposition between social integrity and its disruption is to ignore the deeper implications of the narrative. Coherence and rupture are certainly significant themes, particularly in regard to the metonymic relation between the social and the individual body, but this very concept of integrity and fragmentation is predicated on the operation of particular structures of power which form and shape both the narrative and its underlying framework. Fundamental to these structures of power are the notions of gifting, lack and desire.

The centrality of the gift to the social and narrative structure of the *chansons de geste* has long been recognised, but whereas this generally conforms to the anthropological model of social exchange, *Daurel et Beton* instead offers two competing models of the gift: the anthropological and the psychoanalytic. My reading of *Daurel* will explore the significance of these opposing models in the framing of character and narrative, but also in the wider context of psyche and society.

The opening section of *Daurel et Beton* introduces a world where it is the bonds between men – king, barons, knights and companions – that provide the basis for a harmonious social order. The initial *laisse* underscores the importance of these bonds, as the wealthy Duke Boves of Antona takes Count Gui, who only holds one castle, as his sworn companion. Although important in the feudal and

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\* I would like to thank Hugo Azérad for his most helpful comments on an early version of this article. Many thanks also go to the anonymous readers for *MLR* for their invaluable input.

1 See *A Critical Edition of the Old Provençal Epic Daurel et Beton*, ed. by Arthur S. Kimmel (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971).

2 See Jean-Charles Huchet, *Le Roman occitan médiéval* (Paris: P.U.F., 1991). Huchet includes a range of epic texts in his corpus, but among them are several incomplete works, two epics translated from the French and two whose linguistic forms place them on the boundary between *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl*. 'Le nombre de textes épiques authentiquement occitans conservés' is therefore reduced (*ibid.*, p. 8). See also H. J. Chaytor, *The Provençal Chanson de Geste* (London: 1946), R. Lejeune, *Recherches sur le thème: les chansons de geste et l'histoire* (Liège, 1948), and F. Lot, *Études sur les légendes épiques françaises* (Paris, 1958), among others. On the linguistic identity of *Daurel*, see Simon Gaunt, 'Desnaturat son li frances: Language and Identity in the Twelfth-Century Occitan Epic', *Tenso* 17 (2002), 10–31.

3 Kimmel argues that *Daurel et Beton* is a *chanson* which does not draw directly upon or present a reworking of a northern epic, although it has previously been regarded as an inferior version of *Beuve de Hantone*. The date, provenance and influences of *Daurel* remain uncertain, although Kimmel suggests that the Didot manuscript (containing the only extant version of the poem) was copied in the Toulouse region in the mid-fourteenth century, and that the poem was composed in the mid-twelfth century: see *Daurel*, pp. 34–37. As far as the link with *Beuve de Hantone* is concerned, Kimmel's discussion of the etymology of names in *Daurel* concludes: 'There is no evidence to link the Antona of Duke Bove in *Daurel* with the Hantone in *Beuve*' (p. 40).

4 For the notion of 'monologic masculinity' see Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

social context, this is a commitment which is lifted beyond the mundane: the two men swear their oath of companionship on the Gospels (ll. 27-28), a scene which echoes the marriage ceremony in its portrayal of a promise and a bond sanctified by the presence of God.<sup>5</sup> In addition to swearing faith with Gui, Boves also promises that Gui will become his heir, inheriting Boves' land and his wife too, if Boves should marry and die without leaving a child (ll. 12-21).<sup>6</sup> This is a political, as well as an amicable move: Boves refers to his land as an 'alue' rather than a fief (l. 15); possession of the land is not therefore dependant on the king, and if Boves should die without naming an heir the disputed ownership could provoke warfare. Here, as in many other *chansons de geste*, land and wife exist in parallel, their allocation creating a bond of allegiance and debt that links the giver of the gift and its recipient. In this potential exchange of one man for another – Gui as heir to Boves – Gui is posited as Boves' equivalent and his sanctioned replacement. Yet the very fact that Boves is in a position to promise such a gift marks the inequality of the two men. As pointed out by Marilyn Strathern, the notion of exchange and reciprocity is an ideological construct that mystifies power relationships.<sup>7</sup> And the lack of equality between Boves and Gui is revealed in more ways than one. This is not only a social, but a moral disparity – the narrator's first mention of Gui implies an ambiguity that undercuts the ideal of continuity, harmony and sameness suggested by the narrative: 'lo coms Gui, cui Donedieu mal do!' (l. 8) (Count Gui, may God bring him sorrow!).

The predominant image of masculine cohesion is, however, reinforced by the subsequent affirming and strengthening of the bond that ties Boves to the emperor Charlemagne. In place of one doubled masculine couple the narrative now presents two, suggesting the universality of this network of male inter-reliance. Boves' promise to Gui is now made flesh in the transaction that takes place between duke and emperor, for Charlemagne gifts his sister, Ermenjart, in marriage to Boves, endowing him at the same time with lands and *châteaux* (ll. 132–36). Once again, this is a gifting which is politically expedient: Boves is a powerful duke in Occitania, and Charlemagne emperor of the Franks; the links between the two suggest a harmony between different realms and cultures, as well as between men.<sup>8</sup> The gift is also presented as cementing a personal bond between the two men – wife and lands are given 'per amor' (l. 133), a phrasing which underscores the bonds of friendship and affection between the male protagonists. However, the cycle of exchange implied by the giving of the gift again veils the innate difference between giver and recipient, binding them into a hierarchical order in which exchange mediates the difference between them.

Charlemagne at this point is portrayed as the ideal monarch: he is simultaneously God's representative on earth and feudal overlord, maintaining and strengthening the political structure through the creation of social and economic ties.<sup>9</sup> Boves in turn embodies all the ideal qualities of a powerful lord, ensuring the survival of his property by willing it to his companion, Gui, if he should die without a blood-heir, granting the castle of Moncler to his faithful *jongleur* Daurel, and taking care of Daurel's family in the *jongleur*'s absence. It is here, in the persona of these two men, that power resides: power in moral, social and economic terms, but also the power to act as gift-givers. And this is significant, for it is the economy of the gift that sustains the social and narrative framework.

5 The depth of the bond between the two men has been remarked upon by several critics: for René Nelli it is a 'communion animique' (*L'Érotique des troubadours* (Toulouse: Édouard Privat, 1963), p. 284), for Jacques de Caluwé, 'une amitié plus virile que l'amour' ('Les Liens "féodaux" dans *Daurel et Beton*', in *Études de philologie romane et d'histoire littéraire offerts à Jules Horrent*, ed. by Jean Marie D'Heur and others (Tournai: Gedit, 1980), pp. 105–14 (p. 106)), while Jean-Charles Huchet sees a brotherhood infused by 'une pulsion homosexuelle inconsciente' ('Du Père en littérature', in *Le Moyen Age dans la Modernité. Mélanges offerts à Roger Dragonetti*, ed. by Jean R. Scheidegger (Paris: Champion, 1996), pp. 281–98 (p. 283)). These readings emphasise the fact that this is not simply a social or feudal connection, but one which engages both spiritual and sexual dimensions.

6 This potential inheritance is problematised by the fact that when Boves does die he already has an heir – his infant son, Beton.

7 Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift. Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 146.

8 Gaunt points to the awareness of political, cultural and linguistic difference in twelfth-century Occitania: 'Occitan people certainly had a sense of "France" as a foreign country. Indeed, in the troubadour lyric and in the Occitan *chansons de geste*, "Fransa" has the restricted sense of the royal domains of the Ile-de-France and is not habitually – if at all – used as "France" is in Old French, particularly in the epic, to refer to the mythical greater France of Charlemagne's empire' ('Desnaturat son li frances', p. 17).

9 For a detailed study of the implications of the king's dual role see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

As mentioned above, the gift is an important concept in both anthropological and psychoanalytic contexts. In *Daurel et Beton* it initially functions in its anthropological guise, the economy of the gift creating social networks in the form of a chain of reciprocally dependent relationships of which the circulation of objects is both cause and effect. This contrasts with a commodity economy, in which things are produced for, rather than by, exchange, and where the desire is for an appropriation of objects rather than for an expansion of the social network.<sup>10</sup> It is not only the social matrix of the text that sustains (and is created by) the economy of the gift. Permeating and sanctioning this matrix and its cycle of exchange is the divinity; God is the transcendent father, whose law underpins the bonds created between men. He is an essential aspect of the ideal, imaginary coherence projected by the epic, an integral part of its idealised masculine continuum. God is called upon to sanctify those bonds that invoke fidelity and reciprocal exchange: just as Boves and Gui swear their oath upon the gospel, so too is the marriage between Boves and Ermenjart sanctified by God. The marriage is both a religious and a social ceremony carried out in the presence of the archbishop and of Charlemagne's company of knights (ll. 150-53). It binds Boves and Ermenjart together as man and wife, but simultaneously reinforces the masculine network of cohesion that exists between God, king, barons and knights.

The one initial flaw within this vision of unity is Gui. The narrator's early implication that Gui presents a potential source of disruption – 'Gui cui Donedieu mal do!' (l. 8) – is later confirmed both by the narrator and by Gui himself. At the swearing of their oath the innate difference between Boves and Gui is revealed: 'Et l'us ama per fe, et l'aute per trahiso' (l. 29) (And one of them was a true comrade, and the other false). This split between word and its signification as appears in the oath and its transgression threatens the harmony and integrity described by Sarah Kay:

Cet univers à reflets constants permet aux significations de circuler sans entrave. Le langage est garanti par Dieu (qui donne la Bible et la liturgie) comme l'équilibre social est garanti par le roi (qui remplit ses promesses et accorde les fiefs) et comme le partage et la coopération sont garantis par le compagnonnage et le lignage.<sup>11</sup>

This is a world whose wholeness, synthesis and integrity of language inscribe it into the realm of the Lacanian Imaginary, marking it as an ideal state, but one that operates as veil.

Linguistic and social stability are ruptured further as Ermenjart is handed over to Boves as his wife: Gui mutters under his breath, 'Per aqueta molher molra el a dolor!' (l. 138) (For the sake of this woman he will die a painful death). It is through the introduction of a woman into this network of masculine bonding that its potential fracturing is brought to the surface. The imaginary nature of the homosocial order's unity and completeness has already been suggested through the foretelling of Gui's treachery. Its projected integrity and coherence is now revealed as an ideological dream as Ermenjart becomes the intrusive element that menaces the smooth operation of the social ideal and its existence in the realm of the Imaginary. Yet her role is passive; it is the desire she provokes that ruptures the social, masculine continuum, and Gui who is revealed as the desiring subject.

On a narrative level, Gui is an integral part of the social and epic structure; he is the embodiment of the epic traitor, and although not linked to the treacherous lineage of Ganelon and Hardré, which appears in many other epics, Gui is here their textual heir. His character, as the embodiment of difference, provides the point against which the doubling and similarity of the other male characters is measured. In this he does to an extent mirror Ermenjart, who likewise stands outside the system of harmonious masculine bonding, yet while Ermenjart proves herself totally supportive of the homosocial order, Gui presents the source of its rupture. It is through Gui's words and later through his actions that the vision of social coherence initially presented by the text is split and fragmented. The vision is revealed as a fantasy, and as pointed out by Lacan, fantasy is a projection that veils lack: 'sur le voile se peint l'absence'.<sup>12</sup> Following the revelation of Gui's perfidy, this lack becomes only too apparent, as text and society are opened up to a fragmentation and loss which are manifested

10 See Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, p. 143.

11 Sarah Kay, 'Compagnonnage, désordre social et hétérotextualité dans *Daurel et Beton*', in *Actes du XIe Congrès international de la Société Rencesvals*, I, 353–67 (p. 358).

12 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire IV: La Relation d'objet* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 155. Lacan is here speaking in the context of the fetishistic object and love, but the analogy still holds good in the present context. As Lacan says, the veil is a metaphor that 'tient assurément au sentiment que [l'homme] a d'une certaine illusion fondamentale dans tous les rapports tissés de son désir' (*ibid* p. 155).

through the wounding of both the body politic and the individual body, the failure of Charlemagne as representative of God the transcendent Father, and the replacement of an economy of the gift by a commodity economy.

Gui is also important as it is through his character that desire enters the text and it is desire that produces narrative, breaking the static fantasy of masculine sameness and cohesion. Gui's desire can be read as sexual or political, focused on possession of Ermenjart's body, the land and power she represents, or on a mirrored, unconsciously homosexual, relationship with Boves.<sup>13</sup> Yet Gui's desire goes far beyond this, corresponding to the mimetic desire described by René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*, and to the Lacanian definition of desire as the desire for the fulfilment of a fundamental lack, for the sense of wholeness and coherence.<sup>14</sup> Gui does not only want to possess what Boves possesses, but to *become* Boves and to stand in his place, occupying that primary role as integral subject and holding the power to become giver of the gift. In this, his desire is mimetic. On the psychoanalytic level, it is the space occupied by Boves that represents the promise of the fulfilment of Gui's lack.<sup>15</sup> As observed by Jean-Charles Huchet, Gui's apparent desire for Ermenjart serves as veil for his true desire, not, as Huchet suggests, one that implies a homosexual bond between the two men, but one that would displace Boves in favour of Gui, allowing Gui access to the idealised space of the Imaginary represented by Boves and, at this point, by Charlemagne as representative of the Law-of-the-Father.<sup>16</sup>

Gui's desire to usurp Boves' place brings about not only the fragmentation of the social, but also that of the individual body. Ignoring Ermenjart's warning of Gui's treachery, Boves takes Gui and a few men to hunt down a wild boar.<sup>17</sup> Boves and Gui chase ahead and Boves attacks the boar alone, calling upon Gui to help him at the final moment. When Gui appears, however, he runs his spear not through the boar, but through his companion:

Gui venc tantost cum pot esperonar  
E fer lo duc dejos per l'espaular,  
Que son espieut li fai d'oltra passar,  
Après lo porc fai lo duc eversar! (ll. 378–81)

(Gui rode up spurring hard and struck the duke below the shoulder, driving his spear right through him. He threw the duke down beside the boar).

The attack takes place in the wild, away from the symbolic, social space of the court, where Gui's actions can reflect his true nature, allying him with the savagery of the boar. Kay describes this final fracturing of the bond of male companionship: 'l'union du même au même se brise en faveur d'une alliance entre homme et bête, du même l'union des mots avec leur signification est rompue'; yet as has been seen, the two men are not initially a reflection of each other: difference has always been present, if veiled.<sup>18</sup> Rather than breaking apart a given sameness, Gui's action reveals its ultimate non-existence, its operation as an original fantasy. Revealed also are the fluidity and uncertainty of words split from their signification, as Gui's sworn oath is broken and the narrative loses the integrity and wholeness that marks its imaginary nature.

13 For these objects of Gui's desire, see Santiago López Martínez-Morás and Gerardo Pérez Barcala, 'Femmes et espace dans *Daurel et Beton*', *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 104 (2000), 317–36 (p. 319) and Huchet, 'Du Père en littérature' (p. 283).

14 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Girard calls mimetic desire 'the catalyst for the sacrificial crisis' (p. 148), a crisis which comes fruition to in *Daurel*.

15 In this, Boves represents *objet a*, the object-cause of desire. As explained by Dylan Evans: '*a* denotes the object which can never be attained, which is really the cause of desire rather than that towards which desire tends [...] *Objet petit a* is any object which sets desire in motion' (*An Introductory Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 125).

16 See Huchet, 'Du Père en littérature' (p. 283). Martínez-Morás and Pérez Barcala also regard Gui's passion for Ermenjart as a veil: 'Métaphore de la convoitise de la ville et de l'or, le désir de la femme ne fait que dissimuler l'envie du pouvoir' ('Femmes et espace', p. 319).

17 As is often the case in the *chansons de geste*, it is the female character that possesses insight, yet whose words are ignored. This is despite the fact that Gui has already propositioned Ermenjart and threatened to kill Boves (ll. 231–243).

18 Kay, 'Compagnonnage', p. 360. In her later study, Kay recognises the innate difference between the two companions; see *The 'Chansons de Geste' in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 155.

If Gui can be read as paralleling the boar, so too can Boves, but in his case as sacrificial victim. The initial link established between Charlemagne, Boves, and God as transcendent Father posits Boves, as well as Charlemagne, as a symbolic figure. It is through both men that the phatic economy of the Word is made manifest and the stability of the epic fantasy maintained. If Boves is the tragic hero of *Daurel et Beton*, he is also the Freudian primal father, both God and ‘totemic animal sacrifice’.<sup>19</sup> His death corresponds to Freud’s theory of the father as the focus of an emotional ambivalence – simultaneous love and hate – and the son’s (here Gui’s) desire to take the father’s place.<sup>20</sup> The impossibility of this transposition is underscored by a vivid image that sets the Boves and Gui in a moral hierarchy: ‘Guis lo regarda cum leos cadenatz/ E.l duc lui cum angils enpenatz’ (ll. 418–19) (Gui looked at him like a chained lion and the duke looked back like a winged angel). Despite Gui’s attempt to usurp Boves’ place and to appropriate his power, he is still portrayed as inferior and lacking, his animal nature, chained and restrained, contrasting with Boves’ link to the transcendent and to God.

Despite Gui’s destructive act it is still Boves who holds the position of power as giver of the gift. Although the duke now finally recognises Gui’s treachery, calling him ‘fals companhs’ (l. 390) (false comrade), he also addresses Gui as ‘amix’ and tells him how to frame the scene so it may be read as a hunting accident:

Dis als fals Guis: ‘I. petit m’escoltatz,  
Gardas l’espieut del cor no mi tragas  
Tro qu’ieu vos diga, compays, cum o fassas.  
D’aqueta mort sai que seret reptatz,  
Mas dirai vos, amix, cum o flassatz;  
Las dens del porc mi metres el costatz,  
E vostes spieut e vos el porc ficatz;  
Trastos diron pel porc soi afolat,  
Vos non seres dementitz ni torvat’.

(ll. 395–403)

(He said to the false Gui, ‘Listen to me a moment. Don’t pull the spear out from my body until I have told you what to do. I know you will be accused of my death, but I will tell you my friend, how to act. Fix the boar’s tusks in my side and drive your spear into the boar. All will say that I have been killed by the boar; no-one will contradict you or accuse you’).

He then instructs Gui to take care of Beton, his son, and to request Ermenjart’s hand in marriage from Charlemagne, bizarrely adding that if Gui had made his desire for Ermenjart known earlier, Boves would willingly have passed his wife over to his companion (ll. 407–10).

René Nelli views Boves’ continuing allegiance to his murderer as manifestation of ‘la puissance sacrée de l’amitié jurée’ which takes precedence over any heterosexual bond.<sup>21</sup> This would seem a vain attempt to maintain as ‘sacred’ that which has already been defiled, but it does continue the clear linkage between Boves and both the divine and the integrity and transparency of language as it appears in the sworn oath. As pointed out by Kay, however, this linguistic integrity is broken by Gui’s murderous act, a disruption reinforced by Boves’ own advice to Gui: ‘truth will no longer be accessible to the community, for Boves’ death wound, inflicted by Gui’s spear, will be passed off as the goring of the wild boar’.<sup>22</sup> Boves gifts to Gui the power of untruth, rather than truth, as means of continuing the fantasy of social integrity. Yet this split between word and signification paradoxically negates the very possibility of the fantasy’s continuation, as the state of imaginary wholeness is ruptured by the implementation of an invasive untruth.

At his death, Boves’ status as gift-giver is strongly evident, not only in his bequeathing of land and family to Gui, but also in his desire to protect Gui’s life and to enhance it morally as well as economically.<sup>23</sup> It is at this point that the gift is manifested in psychoanalytic, rather than

19 See Sigmund Freud, ‘Totem and Taboo’ in *The Origins of Religion* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 43–224.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

21 Nelli, *L’Érotique des troubadours*, p. 284.

22 Kay, *The ‘Chansons de Geste’*, p. 156.

23 On this point see Jacques Derrida’s *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Derrida links together Christianity, responsibility and the gift, the gift here being that of infinite love. ‘This

anthropological, terms. Although Lacan also points to the role of the gift in a network of exchange he stresses its symbolic nature:

Le don implique tout le cycle de l'échange, où le sujet s'introduit aussi primitivement que vous pouvez le supposer. Il n'y a don que parce qu'il y a une immense circulation de dons qui recouvre tout l'ensemble intersubjectif. Le don surgit d'un au-delà de la relation objectale, puisqu'il suppose derrière lui tout l'ordre de l'échange où l'enfant est entré, et il ne peut surgir de cet au-delà qu'avec le caractère qui le constitue comme proprement symbolique.<sup>24</sup>

In its symbolic form, the gift is linked to desire – 'le don est symbole de l'amour'. It manifests the beyond of the Symbolic, remaining eternally nebulous and unachievable, its representation a veil and an illusion. 'Quand il est là, l'objet se manifeste essentiellement comme n'étant que signe du don, c'est-à-dire comme rien en tant qu'objet de satisfaction. Il est justement là pour être repoussé en tant qu'il est ce rien'.<sup>25</sup>

The gift which Boves now offers is that of life itself, not only in the form of the scheme to prevent the accusation of Gui for murder, but also in the offering of Boves' heart and his blood as redemptive sacrifice.<sup>26</sup> The Eucharist is initially invoked as Boves calls upon Gui to give him lay communion, in which the host is replaced by blades of grass (ll. 427–28). Gui refuses, and refuses again as the Christological metaphor is reinvoked in the body of Boves himself. His sides lacerated by the spear of his enemy, Boves offers his heart, metonym for courage and virtue, to be eaten by Gui. But just as Gui rejects the network of exchange which operates between God and man, so too does he reject the possibility of taking Boves' place through the ingestion of the gift he offers. Lacan's theory of the gift that can never fully be given holds true: Gui's desire can never be satisfied for any thing, any object, which holds out the promise of satisfaction can never fulfil its promise and must be rejected.

Although Gui refuses Boves' offer of the heart which symbolises bodily sameness and masculine cohesion as well as accession to the spiritual realm, he does accept Boves' advice as to the disguising of his crime. His laceration of Boves' body with the tusks of the boar is an attempt to take control and to produce his own version of events, a version which will later be read by the hunters, but what Gui also does is to write his own crime upon the body of Boves. The double significance of the wounds makes them a deceptive *senhal*, bound to 'la mort, la tromperie et le mensonge'.<sup>27</sup> They reinterpret Boves' death, turning him from redemptive Christ-figure to sacrificial victim, his flesh eaten not by Gui, but mutilated as though eaten by the boar – metaphor for Gui's own animal nature. Christ-figure or sacrificial victim: the two faces of sacrifice are interdependent and interchangeable, yet neither produces redemption. Instead, Boves' violent death represents a nadir, and a point of no return.

The narrative touchstone is now Gui. He tells Charlemagne, 'Serai el loc del duc qu'es traspasatz' (l. 577) (I will take the place of the duke who is dead), and his actions do mimic the earlier ones of Boves, as he allies himself with Charlemagne and marries Ermenjart. But the vision of similarity and reciprocal exchange that structured society and narrative is now fragmented, the transcendent presence of God denied, and Charlemagne falls from his position of symbolic father, guarantor of law, language and meaning. In a parody of earlier events, Charlemagne does not gift Ermenjart to Gui, but 'sells' her for packhorses laden with gold and silver (ll. 568–75) – the commodity economy replaces that of the gift. Ermenjart recognises this shift: 'Aital ric rey si fo en bon ponh natz/ Que per aver de sa sor fai mercatz!' (ll. 622–23) (A noble king indeed, born under a lucky star, who sells his sister for profit!), but her words are ignored, as are those which denounce Gui as traitor and murderer (ll. 619–31). This provides an instance of Ermenjart's reinvoking and supporting the original social order, yet it is she who proves the unwitting catalyst for its disruption. Gui and Ermenjart are married, but this marriage is not sanctified by God, as it lacks the presence of a bishop; it also takes place in private, marking the

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gift of infinite love comes from someone and is addressed to someone; responsibility demands irreplaceable singularity. Yet only death or rather the apprehension of death can give this irreplaceability, and it is only on the basis of it that one can speak of a responsible subject' (p. 51).

<sup>24</sup> Lacan, *Le Séminaire IV*, p. 182.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>26</sup> I would here agree with Caluwé, who views this scene as an expression of 'la symbolique chrétienne' rather than of 'l'animisme primitif' ('Les Liens "féodaux"', p. 108).

<sup>27</sup> See Huchet, 'Du Père en littérature', pp. 289–90. This is a crime which is initially read correctly by the hunters, and later by Ermenjart.

fragmenting of the social space and the loss of openness and reciprocal exchange. Its illegitimacy is underscored by Ermenjart, who throws her wedding ring into the fire immediately following the ceremony:

‘Fraire’ disa ela, ‘per forsa lo.m donatz.  
Dieus vos cofonda que en cros fo levatz!  
Flodres vos parga ans que sias tornatz!’ (ll. 639–41)

(‘Brother’, she said, ‘You give him to me by force. May God who hung on the cross confound you. May lightning strike you before you reach home!).

This is the ultimate rift, as the harmonious bond between God and man is split apart – God is no longer an integral aspect of society and its narrative, but is set in opposition to his representative on earth, the emperor Charlemagne. It is significant that it is a woman’s words that both mark this rupture and paradoxically seem to call it into being. Ermenjart’s relationship to the homosocial masculine order remains ambiguous, yet if she cannot partake of its imaginary aspect, she can nonetheless support its symbolic, social framework.

Although Gui has taken Boves’ place, possessing both Boves’ lands and his wife, his lack is still apparent, his desire continuously deferred. And this is a lack and a desire which are reflected by the text itself. Boves was the original focus of desire, standing as its symbolic referent, and, in Lacanian terms, as *objet a* or object-cause of desire. Boves now dead, this space is revealed as empty, lacking in any substance. The promise held out by his symbolic coherence cannot be fulfilled, as the *objet a* is nothing but an illusion around which desire turns. Once the fantasy of sameness and reciprocity has been revealed as a fantasy, it cannot be re-established, although the epic tries its utmost. It is the child Beton that represents the return of the same, as heir to his father, Boves, and as remainder of the imaginary vision of coherence in which son succeeded father in a symbolic continuum.<sup>28</sup> It is Beton who now provokes both desire and narrative, as he provides the focus of the epic desire for continuity and the promise of a return to the fantasy of wholeness. It is the circulation of his body which produces narrative, as the infant is first given by his mother to the lady Aisilineta, who nurses him, is then passed to the *jongleur* Daurel’s wife, Beatris, and is finally taken to Babylon by Daurel.<sup>29</sup>

If Beton represents the focus of narrative desire, for Gui he represents a threat which must be extinguished. This tension between continuation and violent disruption, between the imaginary state of homosocial cohesion and its disintegration, now threatens to pull the world apart. The child’s geographic and narrative trajectory is accompanied by an increasing violence, a violence now displaced from the representatives of the homosocial order to the peripheral characters of the women who protect its remaining hope.<sup>30</sup> Gui first of all attacks Ermenjart for hiding away her son and claiming he is dead (ll. 760–63), then orders the whipping of Aisilineta, who shelters and nurses Beton (ll. 918–22). The violence reaches its apogee as Gui lays siege to Daurel’s castle, where Beton is hidden (ll. 942–81). This episode sees a return to the topos of the gift, a gift that echoes Boves’ offering of his heart, and implicitly his life, to Gui. Again, it is a life, or rather a death, which is offered – this time the innocent life of Daurel and Beatris’ infant son Daurelet, who is handed over to Gui in place of Beton. The substitution of one child for another involves a doubling of the body which is underscored by the fact that the two children are born on the same night (ll. 1006–07). Despite the difference in their social status, the infants are mirror to one another in a way which Boves and Gui were not, as both represent the network of exchange and duty originally upheld by the narrative. The substitution of Daurelet is presented as a legitimate and responsible act, even though it involves the

28 For the symbolic nature of lineage in the *chanson de geste* see R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) and my *Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the ‘Chanson de Geste’* (Oxford, Bern & New York: Peter Lang, 2003). Beton’s existence obviously complicates Gui’s claim to Boves’ inheritance.

29 Importantly, it is women who shelter and protect the infant while he is in his own country.

30 The peripheral nature of the female role in Daurel is recognised by Martínez-Morás and Pérez Barcala: ‘Il semble que le rôle des personnages féminins est toujours limité au sacrifice et à l’effacement de leur nature dans la vie politique de l’univers occidental’ (‘Femmes et espace’, p. 332). Yet this reading presumes that women have no intrinsic part to play in the political and social structure. On the contrary, their role as protectors of the *status quo* and its representatives is more stable and coherent than that of the central male characters.



sacrifice of an innocent child. In this, it evokes the potential sacrifice of Isaac and the moral and ethical dilemma faced by Abraham as God calls upon him to murder his beloved son. As Derrida, drawing on Kant and Kierkegaard, suggests:

The paradox of faith is that interiority remains ‘incommensurable with exteriority’ [...] absolute duty (toward God and in the singularity of faith) implies a sort of gift or sacrifice that functions beyond both debt and duty, beyond duty as a form of debt. This is the dimension that provides for a ‘gift of death’ which, beyond human responsibility, beyond the universal concept of duty, is a response to absolute duty.<sup>31</sup>

The ‘absolute duty’ invoked in *Daurel et Beton* is that towards God, but God as made manifest in His order on earth, in the reciprocal and harmonious exchange between men which is sanctified and permeated by the divine presence.

Although Daurel and Beatris do not themselves put their child to death, they are well aware of the outcome of handing him over to Gui; it is Beatris who suggests the substitution:<sup>32</sup>

Vec vos aissi aquest efan que jatz?  
 Vostre [senher] e mos filh propiatz  
 En una nueh ambidoi foro natz.  
 Batejet lo lo duc qu'es traspasatz  
 En aicel pali; e vos l'evolopatz  
 E Betonetz el bresolet colgatz,  
 E nostre filh al traïdor portat  
 E de luy fasa totas sas voluntatz.  
 Morra mos filh, mo senher er salvatz! (ll. 1005–13)

(Do you see this child lying here? Your [lord] and my own son were both born in a single night. The duke who is dead baptised him in this silk shawl; now wrap him up and lift little Beton out of the cradle and take our son to the traitor. Let him do as he likes with him. My son will die, my lord will be saved.)

Beatris' prophecy comes true, as Gui dashes out Daurelet's brains against a pillar (ll. 1030–33). Yet this is a substitution which aims at a return to the state of imaginary coherence, to a social order dependant on reciprocity and interdependence. It is therefore presented as a worthwhile, and even a moral, act. Beton, as representative of the father (both God and Boves), is saved, his future return promised by his escape to the otherworld of Babylon.<sup>33</sup> Blood and sacrifice in *Daurel et Beton* symbolise the potential for redemption, the link with the divine and the promise of renewal. The constant recurrence of the topos signals the necessity for this source of redemption to be brought into play, as the broken body simultaneously signals the fragmentation of the social body and presents the potential means of its healing.

Despite Gui's violent actions, and his attempt to take control of both events and their meaning, it is clear that he does not possess the symbolic status of Boves or (originally) of Charlemagne. Power is revealed as elusive; linked to the *objet a* and to the realm of the Imaginary, it is the partial aim and manifestation of desire. Power is invested in the social and individual body, appearing in particular in the guise of the power to gift, but in its psychoanalytic manifestation this remains anonymous and

<sup>31</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Beatris' active instigation of the surrender of Daurelet contrasts with the role of Belissant in the *chanson de geste* of *Ami et Amile*, ed. by Peter F. Dembowski (Paris: Champion, 1969). Here, it is the father, Amile, who takes the decision to sacrifice his two sons (and who carries out the act himself). Peggy McCracken sees this latter example as typifying gender roles in relation to child sacrifice: 'A father's murder may be explained as a sacrifice, not a vengeance: a father may kill his child in the service of some higher good or higher purpose. [...] Mothers' murders are located in the realm of the domestic, not the divine; they offer revenge, not a covenant; they impose local justice, not the higher justice of divine right' ('Engendering Sacrifice: Blood, Lineage, and Infanticide in Old French Literature', *Speculum* 77 (2002), 55–75 (p. 56)). She does not, however, examine the case of *Daurel et Beton* which, to an extent, contradicts her thesis.

<sup>33</sup> In parallel to the world of the forest in which Boves met his death, Babylon represents a space beyond the symbolic world of Occitania. Babylon, however, is an ideal, imaginary realm, replacing the fragmented feudal world and providing a static, harmonious sphere in which Beton can grow to adulthood.

inaccessible to appropriation. This is ‘the *gift that is not a present*, the gift of something that remains inaccessible, unpresentable, and as a consequence secret’.<sup>34</sup>

The point at which Gui does access a kind of power is at his death. Here it is he who takes on the role of sacrificial victim, sacrificed to cleanse and redeem epic society as he is expelled from both it and the narrative. It is his function as *pharmakos* that affirms the primacy of the fantasy of masculine cohesion, his death confirming its pre-eminence in a way that reflects Freud’s vision of a society based on totemic sacrifice and a return of the same in *Totem and Taboo*.<sup>35</sup> Yet although Gui’s death does open up the way for a reaffirmation of the fantasy dreamed by the epic, this does not come to pass. Following his death a gap is left vacant; the epic ideal has nothing against which it may be measured and nothing that can call it back into being.

The introduction of Ermenjart into the masculine frame of the epic makes explicit Gui’s alterity, his lack of sameness, and serves as catalyst for the emergence of desire. It is the circulation and deferral of this desire which then produce narrative. While Gui remains active in the narrative, narrative happens; the epic ideal cannot function without this intrusive supplement which is desire, this remainder that confirms the epic fantasy. The impetus towards violence and disruption embodied by Gui cannot therefore be closed down. It is instead reasserted in the final extant *laissez*, as the adult Beton affirms his intention of confronting Charlemagne and avenging his treatment of Ermenjart:

‘Ges no.l tenc per senhor ni per paran;  
Tant cant ieu puesca portar mon garniman  
Non aura patz a totz lo mieu vivan’ (ll. 2134–36)

(I don’t regard him as either my lord or my kinsman. As long as I can bear arms he will have no peace, as long as I live).

The tensions simultaneously played out and dissimulated by *Daurel et Beton* are representative of the genre as a whole. Violence, rupture and fragmentation confront stasis, reciprocity and continuation as the *chanson* provides a forum for the mediation of the preoccupations that haunt the genre. Yet as initially remarked, this is a text that explores issues that go beyond this pattern of social stasis and rupture. In *Daurel*, power relations are linked to the body: the fragmentation and wounding of the individual body as metonym for that of the social body, the body and its sacrifice as link to the transcendent and the divine. It is through the substitution, or attempted substitution, of one body for another that the strategies of power that shape the narrative are played out, yet the body itself is revealed as symbolic, polyvalent in its relation to loss, desire, redemption and power.

It is through the symbolic body that the gift makes its appearance, for this is intrinsically linked to the circulation and substitution of bodies in *Daurel*. In its anthropological guise the gift is that of the female body in marriage as means of mediating social and power relations – a topos that appears regularly in the *chanson de geste*. In its psychoanalytic manifestation it is symbol of that which remains forever inaccessible; the body and the space which it occupies stand in the place of the gift – Boves’ heart holds out the promise of completion and fulfilment, Ermenjart represents the potential accession to Boves’ social and symbolic space, Beton’s circulating body represents, in different ways, the focus of desire for Gui and for the epic itself. The gift is ambiguous, representing power as well as ultimate love, wholeness and completion. While the narrative presses toward a restitution of the gift economy, it is the psychoanalytic notion of the gift that ultimately dominates, the interplay between the two revealing the deeper implications of the narrative’s framing in terms of lack and desire.

The shaping of *Daurel et Beton* in terms that reflect Lacan’s triadic structure of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, and Derrida’s deconstruction of ethical responsibility in the face of the call to religious sacrifice, the *mysterium tremendum*, lifts it beyond its spatio-temporal context to encapsulate those visions that explore the construction of psyche and subject, and their relation to the

34 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 29.

35 As pointed out by Girard: ‘The word *pharmakon* in classical Greek means both poison and the antidote for poison, both sickness and cure’ (*Violence and the Sacred*, p. 94). Gui functions as both; he never becomes the Freudian primal father and his role as sacrificial victim does not therefore entirely parallel Freud’s thesis.

transcendent (whether this be the Lacanian Other or the Christian divine).<sup>36</sup> In *Daurel* the fantasy of a coherent homosocial order is closely linked to the integrity of the individual body. Both figure the fundamental desire for a wholeness and completeness which is invoked either through the operation of a chain of substitution and the return of the same, or through the topos of gifting and redemptive sacrifice. Yet this dream of coherence cannot be sustained. The introduction of Ermenjart as intrusive supplement breaks the fantasy apart, but this same rupture is revealed as essential to the continuing perception of this fantasy as an ideal state. Through Gui's mendacity the ideal, imaginary transparency of language is lost; through his violence the homosocial body is split apart, yet violence of language and of act are bound to the operation of desire, and it is the circulation and endless deferral of desire that provokes a coming-into-being. This is the *naissance* of narrative, but also that of the speaking subject that falls between the Real and the Imaginary states of being. The violence of *Daurel et Beton* invokes the rupture produced by the *nom(non)-du-père* that calls the subject into being and inaugurates the realm of the Symbolic. Violence and its representatives (here Gui) appear an essential element within the matrix of desire, revealing fundamental lack, but also allowing the gift to be made manifest, a gift that points towards the transcendent and, in the context of the medieval epic, the divine, as source of renewal, faith, and continuation.

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36 Derrida defines the *mysterium tremendum* as 'the gift of infinite love, the dissymmetry that exists between the divine regard that sees me, and myself, who doesn't see what is looking at me; it is the gift and endurance of death that exist in the irreplaceable, the disproportion between the infinite gift and my finitude, responsibility as culpability, sin, salvation, repentance, and sacrifice' (*The Gift of Death*, pp. 55-56).